



## Information Society The African vision



The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) offers a new window of opportunity to the world, especially to the African peoples.

Archaeological and historical evidence point to Africa as the cradle of Mankind and a great contributor to human civilization. Yet – and owing to a number of combined adverse factors – Africa has largely lagged behind the rest of the world in terms of development opportunities, its vast resources and potential notwithstanding.

The winds of change brought about by the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) are blowing over the continent of Africa and establishing new paradigms as to how people live, work and relate to one another or to organisations.

Ever since the African Information Society Initiative was launched in the mid-90s, a host of achievements have been recorded on the continent: thanks to the Pan African Telecommunications Project, intra-African traffic and network integration has improved; the Regional African Satellite Communications (RASCOCOM) system now provides common carrier communications; in most of Africa, teledensity has risen significantly in recent times, thanks especially to the advent of mobile telephony; telecentres and community multimedia centres are taking root and providing access to under-served areas. But challenges to be overcome are still enormous: inadequate infrastructure, ICT skills, content, to name but a few.

Under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the African continent seeks to use ICTs to accelerate socio-economic development and to foster intra-regional trade and integration.

By bringing together the international community and world leaders to craft a common vision on the Information Society, thus adopting a Declaration of Principles and a Plan of Action, this summit will provide a guide and a monitoring tool by which to judge our success in narrowing the digital divide, reduce poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The African vision of the new Information Society is one in which ideas flow freely, one which leads to the knowledge society, where the issues of language, education, literacy, dialogue of cultures and civilizations, and human development take centre stage. To make this vision a reality, a strong leadership is needed, and public-private partnership is a must. Africa stands ready to take up the challenge and calls upon its development partners to come forward and lend their unequivocal support in building an Information Society that is inclusive. The summit's second phase, to be held in Tunis in 2005, will provide an unparalleled opportunity for us to judge where each of us stand on this fundamental issue.

**Joaquim Alberto Chissano**  
*President of Mozambique  
Chairman of the African Union*

GENEVA

## Let us begin now a positive process



Radio needed 37 years to reach 50 million listeners. It took the World Wide Web just over 3 years to acquire 50 million users. This unprecedented expansion of the information society opens up a wealth of opportunities. The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) is about making the most of these for all the world's peoples.

But, sceptics may say, what does this matter if you live on less than a dollar a day? What does cybersecurity, spam and domain names mean if you are starving or cannot get basic medicines? A great deal, in fact. It is all about access.

Because access to information and communication technologies (ICT) is empowerment. Access is not merely infrastructure and hardware. It is also capacity and content. With genuine access, ICT has the potential to extend considerably the reach of education, training and basic health services. ICT can transform markets, business practices and even electoral procedures. These are critical factors in achieving sustainable development.

But ICT is only a tool. It is up to us what we make of it and how. That is what this Summit is about. It is not about bits and bytes; it is about formulating a common vision about what kind of a world we want to live in.

We can only put together such a shared vision in an inclusive partnership. All stakeholders – national governments, civil society and the business community – need to contribute, and all these groups have made significant contributions to the preparatory process.

It is not a straightforward exercise, and it is bound to trigger a lively debate. As any groundbreaking discussion, it will take time. The debate is only starting here in Geneva. It will build up, and it will continue - not just between the two phases of the WSIS in Geneva and Tunis, but probably far beyond that. Yet, the complexity of the challenge

should not deter us. ICT has the power to dramatically change our world for the better – if we want it to.

This is an important point. Just as ICT has the potential to narrow the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', it could also entrench inequalities and even generate new dividing lines between 'information rich' and 'information poor'. This Summit is also about making sure that the technology revolution truly becomes a vehicle for development.

This is why the entire United Nations system, throughout Geneva and beyond, supports the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the Host Country authorities in the organization of this extraordinary Summit, held under the patronage of the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. ICT can be a powerful ally in our joint efforts to

realize the Millennium Development Goals – the poverty-reduction agenda agreed by world leaders at the Millennium Summit in 2000.

It is very appropriate that our discussion on the information society starts here in Geneva. The World Wide Web was developed in this city at CERN and has become the fastest-growing communications medium in history. Let us begin now in Geneva a positive process of shaping the kind of information society that we want and let this process gain momentum – just like the Internet itself. With the technology revolution, opportunity knocks for everybody. It is our duty to open up to take advantage of these opportunities for the whole human family. Let's have a good start.

**Sergei Ordzhonikidze**

*United Nations Under-Secretary-General  
Director-General of the UN Office at Geneva*

## THE SUMMIT

# A new type of global forum

It has taken us three years to reach this point. I vividly remember the day the summit was divided into two parts, with the first one being attributed to Switzerland and the second one to Tunisia. It was in the year 2000, when I was President of the Swiss Confederation.

Now we are here, in Geneva, and we see the delegates gathering to attend a new type of global forum, a "multi-stakeholder" venue, about a "multiple-issue" subject as diverse and fluid as the still-to-be-defined "information society". These delegates, who will have to tackle every aspect of how we interact on this planet, how we share information and knowledge, a topic that ranges from mere access to an old fashioned telephone to the technology and implications of a communication satellite.

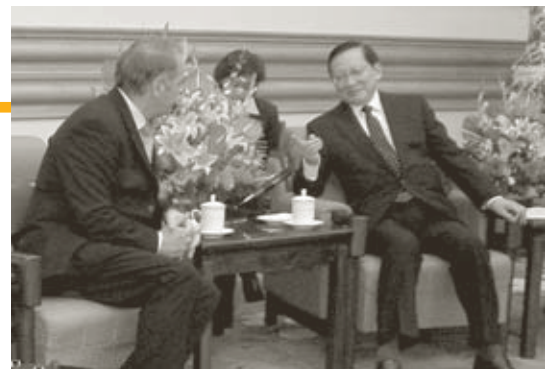
The work achieved over the past three years has been proportional to the scale and complexity of the subjects awaiting discussion here. With the em-

phasis on a democratic process, for the first time in history a global summit of this kind will gather governments, civil society and the private sector under the same roof. They all stated their interests, made their demands and more often than not came up with conflicting positions.

I am convinced that the Geneva part of the summit will set the direction of ICT development for the decades to come. However, with such important challenges and high expectations, it will be difficult, in this first phase, to achieve a fully satisfactory result.

The Swiss authorities have called on me in the final stages of preparations. My role was to help find a consensus for the remaining points of friction, such as the role of the media, freedom of expression or internet governance.

I have met the representatives of many nations in Geneva and around the world. I have asked for flexibility, for open-



Adolf Ogi with Chinese State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan  
mindedness and for goodwill, so that apparently irreconcilable views could be expressed and a dialogue initiated.

To my great surprise, these discussions did not reflect the usual North-South and East-West confrontation lines. The information society debate has created new groups with new synergies, unlikely partners that suddenly joined forces for the sake of development.

I have come to realise that the fact that we have an open and frank discussion about these subjects today, here in this democratic forum rather than in a secluded negotiation room, is already quite an achievement.

For some governments, it is their fundamental system of functioning that is being challenged by the omnipresent world wide web. The lack of control over the information accessible on the web is unacceptable to them, whereas other states are quite satisfied with the status quo and do not want it changed. I have been confronted with such debates, and they have taught me renewed respect for my colleagues, an appreciation of what they have been able to achieve in the behind-the-curtain negotiations that have been going on, especially throughout the last year. Our aim now must be to agree as much as possible on a political statement, a clear sign that shows our commitment to development through a more equal access to information and knowledge. A second document, the plan of action, will serve as the blueprint of what needs to be achieved between now in Geneva and in Tunis in 2005.

On Saturday December 13<sup>th</sup> 2003, we will know which direction the governments, civil society and the private sector will follow in the years to come. Whatever their choice, we will expect from them that they go on being responsible negotiating partners and that they continue to foster development worldwide. This is just the first summit ...

**Adolf Ogi**

*Special Adviser to the Swiss Federal Council  
on the WSIS*

WSIS

## A place to forge partnerships



The World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva, December 2003, and Tunis, November 2005) is a timely opportunity. Organized by the International

Telecommunication Union with the support of the United Nations system, it can help us better understand how the information revolution is transforming our societies. It offers a forum to develop a shared vision of an information society that empowers and benefits all people. And it can help us to make specific connections between information and communication technologies and the Millennium Development Goals set by the international community, since without creative and widespread of those technologies, the goals will be that much harder to meet. The Summit should also be a place to forge partnerships. Many actors have much to offer: the scientists that make the technology possible; the private sector enterprises that turn science into tools; the community groups and civil society organizations that are so dynamic in using those tools; the gov-

ernments that create the necessary regulatory frameworks; and the media, who are both creators of content and connections that tie the global village together, and essential watchdogs that illuminate us about our world – thanks to the precious right of press freedom, as spelled out in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments. A parallel event to the Summit, the World Electronic Media Forum, will bring together media executives and practitioners from developed and developing countries, as well as policy-makers, to discuss the role of the electronic media in the information society.

Information and communication technologies are the driving forces of globalization, with great potential to help people improve their lives. But they are not an end in themselves, or a magic formula that is going to solve all our problems. While technology shapes the future, ultimately it is people who shape technology, and decide to what uses it can and should be put. The World Summit on the Information Society can and must help us do just that.

**Kofi A. Annan**

*UN Secretary-General*

### NEW TECHNOLOGIES

## Advantages accessible to all



The development of the information society is a priority for the Government of Spain. This explains why our country is participating with such keen interest in the WSIS, organised by the International Telecommunication Union under the patronage of the UN Secretary-General.

The Summit provides a unique opportunity to give concrete expression to a plan of action for the realisation of a global information society. Spain will ac-

tively participate in the Summit by contributing its experience in the development of such a society, learning about actions undertaken by other countries and seeking solutions to ensure that the advantages derived from the information society are accessible to all.

To facilitate Spain's participation in the Summit, the country's Ministry of Science and Technology has published a book entitled *The Information Society in the 21st Century: A Requirement*

for Development. Moreover, it has prepared a theme-based contribution containing a series of measures for inclusion in a plan of action.

Clearly, the information society should not be an end in itself. The primary goal is to devise a new relational framework which will make life easier for people and businesses at large. For this reason alone, developing the information society should be a priority for all countries.

The Spanish Government, together with a wide array of public and private bodies, is strenuously committed to enhancing the access of all to the information society. Three basic approaches are being emphasised in this regard: connectivity, e-government, and digital education.

Connectivity is being enhanced through major programmes aiming at facilitating access to the World Wide Web by installing public high-speed Internet access points in libraries, educational centres, and under-privileged areas.

E-government is a key factor in the development of the information society insofar as new technologies will improve the effectiveness of public services through closer government-public interaction.

Digital education must be available to all, not least the youth. Acquiring the skills to use new technologies in the coming years will enable young people to become a driving force behind the information society within their circles of friends and family.

Capacity building in the area of new technologies is obviously crucial to the creation of a society committed to innovation and productivity in this new age of knowledge.

However, furthering the information society will require content, applications, and services that are truly useful for our citizens. In this respect, I would like to see the Hispanic community draw on the strength of its language and the potential market it represents, in order to promote and disseminate such types of services over the Internet. In conclusion, I trust that Spain's experience in developing the information society will make a meaningful contribution to the upcoming Summit.

**Juan Costa Climent**

*Minister of Science and Technology (Spain)*

UNESCO

## Towards Knowledge Societies

UNESCO has long been actively concerned with the key issues to be addressed by the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society, particularly as they are directly relevant to the Organization's constitutional mandate to promote the free exchange of ideas and knowledge, between peoples and within societies. Along with many of our partners, both within and outside the United Nations system, we believe that certain major intellectual and ethical debates should be recognized as being central to the Summit's work. The importance of technological and infrastructural issues is undeniable, but the Summit should also deliberate upon a number of social, political, cultural and institutional dimensions of change. The Summit offers indeed an opportunity to address an enlarged policy agenda that is informed by intellectual and ethical considerations, which include questioning the very notion of the "information society" and embraces such matters as social inclusion, youth, gender, cul-

tural diversity, human rights and inter-cultural dialogue.

I strongly believe that the concept of "knowledge societies" is preferable to that of the "information society" as it goes beyond issues of connectivity and technological development to encompass a broader and more empowering vision that is based on the potential of ICT to enhance human development.

It is especially important to understand that knowledge societies may take many different forms, based on choice. Consequently, we must ask what kind of knowledge societies we should build, what are their foundations and purposes, and what are the operative principles that should guide their development. Through such questioning, we can explore the scope for choosing the kind of societies to be built.

The concept of "Knowledge societies" also better enables us to address three central challenges of the future:

- First, narrowing the digital divide that accentuates disparities in develop-

ment, excluding entire groups and countries from the benefits of information and knowledge;

- Second, guaranteeing the free flow of, and equitable access to, data, information, best practices and knowledge; and

- Third, building international consensus on shared values and principles.

Underpinning UNESCO's approach are four key principles: freedom of expression; equal access to education; universal access to information based on a guarantee of a strong public domain of information; and the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity, including multilingualism.

Knowledge societies should be based on a strong commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression as enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Knowledge societies should mean the full realization of the right to education and of all cultural rights. In knowledge so-



cities, access to the public domain of information and knowledge for educational and cultural purposes should be as broad as possible. An important principle of knowledge societies should be encouraging and giving expression to cultural and linguistic diversity.

I hope that these crucial principles will be incorporated into the vision of the Summit and will find a prominent

place in the Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action.

UNESCO, for its part, by drawing upon its multisectoral expertise and interdisciplinary ethos, brings a distinctive voice to the Summit's preparations. In addition, we enjoy a wide range of partnerships and collaborations with many different constituencies and can thus serve as a bridge between civil society, governments,

professional communities and users. I am confident that the leaders attending the Summit will grasp the opportunity to utilize the knowledge revolution to improve the lives of people hitherto left behind and to build a new world founded on knowledge and the free flow of ideas, in the spirit of global solidarity.

**Koichiro Matsuura**

*Director-General of UNESCO*

WSIS

## An opportunity to grasp

WSIS will bring together at the highest level leaders of governments, industry and civil society to address the issues through which information and communications technology is driving the knowledge revolution that is shaping the human future. ICT opens up exciting new pathways for universality of education, training and a host of cooperative activities which serve our common interests and provide the basis for a more peaceful, secure and sustainable world community.

The extensive negotiations of the Declaration of Principles and the Action Plan for their implementation will enable leaders gathered at the Summit to agree on the basic principles and agenda which will guide the essential processes of humanizing this technology and ensuring universal access to the benefits it can produce. And the Summit Events which have been organized by the Swiss hosts of the Summit will bring to it an impressive array of practical examples, insights and ideas that will enrich the Summit experience and enhance its impacts.

In a world in which summits have proliferated this one is unique. Both in its subject matter, which is influencing virtually every aspect of our lives and the direction of our future, and in the fact that it is taking place in two separate but closely related

phases. The close collaboration established between the Swiss as hosts of the first phase of the Summit in Geneva from December 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>, 2003 and the Tunisian government as hosts of the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase to be held in Tunis from 16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> November 2005 ensures the linkage and continuity as between the two phases. The United Nations is strongly supportive of the Summit and its Secretariat provided by the International Telecommunications Union. Indeed, Secretary General Kofi Annan has seconded one of his most senior and experienced officials, Nitin Desai, to advise and assist it.

Preparations for the Summit have made clear the challenges that confront the world community in achieving its goal of ensuring that the benefits of information and communications technology become universally available, particularly to the peoples of the developing world. No technology has a greater potential to improve the lives and the prospects of the poor and under privileged. But this will not happen automatically. It requires concerted and cooperative action by the international community in establishing the principles and undertaking the action agenda to be approved at the Geneva Summit. This will provide the indispensable foundations for the information society.

The Summit must launch a continuing process to build on these foundations the practical measures and cooperative activities which will support the full participation by developing countries and the less privileged in all countries in the knowledge revolution which is the key to the future of all. For knowledge is the principal source of wealth creation and comparative advantage in today's technological civilization and ICT is the pathway to knowledge.

While it is encouraging to witness the rapid spread of cellular telephones in developing countries it would be a mistake to believe that this means that the digital divide is narrowing. On the contrary it will continue to widen as the digital revolution moves beyond the capacity of developing countries to keep up. For experience demonstrates that the digital divide does not result from the inadequacies of terminal equipment but from lack of economic accessibility of connections and telecommunications tariffs that put it beyond the means of the poor.

There is still time for an initiative to be launched at Geneva and developed on the road to Tunis to examine the best means of bridging this divide. This could be done through the establishment of an Expert Commission, independent of, but feeding into the

# "The information society will have a profound

preparatory process for Tunis and specifically mandated to seek solutions to the problems from the perspective of users and potential beneficiaries. It could, for example, examine the prospect of allowing electric power companies which already have significant infrastructure to provide data transmission and of encouraging all forms of broadband wireless and wireline through regulatory regimes that would provide incentives to promote economic accessibility.

It could also be timely to agree in Geneva on the mechanisms for international governance and cooperation in dealing with ICT issues, including the mandate of ICT itself. The principal focus must be on the policies and practical measures most likely to reach the goal of ensuring universal access to the manifold advantages and benefits of ICT to open up a new era of opportunity and equity for the entire human family. Otherwise ICT may well become the

instrument for deepening and perpetuating the divide between rich and poor. This is the crux of the historic opportunity offered by the WSIS. It is one we cannot fail to grasp.

**Maurice Strong**

*Special Advisor of the Swiss Government  
for the WSIS*

## E-TRADE AND WSIS

# Putting "e" to work for development



The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) is a

major opportunity for stakeholders from all sectors to work collectively to address the digital divide. Readers may be familiar with the benefits of information and communications technologies when applied to health, education and other government services, but less is said about the significant potential of these technologies to spur trade and economic opportunities in the developing world. At the International Trade Centre (ITC), we are actively working with partners in the Summit process to help raise awareness, build knowledge and create competence at key levels on using these technologies for the benefit of trade and economic progress in developing countries and transition economies.

Few would dispute that information and communication technologies are changing the face of business: from

agriculture to industrial products, to consumer goods and professional services, technology matters. Companies that embrace these technologies are able to boost their competitive position by doing "old" businesses in "new" ways, reducing costs, improving customer service and opening entirely new business opportunities. Despite these benefits, not all businesses are applying information and communications technologies. And of those who are, not all are equipped to do so effectively. This is especially true for many small and medium-sized businesses in the developing world. As a result, they risk falling behind in an increasingly competitive e-enabled marketplace.

The WSIS is a unique platform for stakeholders in the field of trade and development to address this challenge. Together with the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (seco), we are organizing a series of interactive workshops from 11-12 December, as part of the WSIS ICT4D Platform to help small firms in developing and transition economies apply information and communications technologies to become more competitive. With the theme *The Changing Marketplace: Putting 'e' to Work*, the workshops will address practical experiences about e-business development. Dur-

ing the sessions, the International Trade Centre and seco will also present their contributions such as the e-Trade Bridge Programme, the Swiss-Jordanian e-trade platform, operational handbooks on e-waste and e-security and other experiences around the world. These interactive workshops will build on the major themes of the infoDev Symposium entitled "ICT for Development: What Works, What Does Not Work" to take place from 9-10 December 2003.

And as we head towards the WSIS to be held in Tunis, in 2005, we will redesign our e-related programmes to incorporate the recommendations from the WSIS Action Plan formulated in Geneva in 2003, and actively take part in the event to report on our e-trade strategy training and e-trade development programmes.

At ITC, no efforts are being spared in helping small and medium-sized firms in developing countries and transition economies put 'e' to work and overcome the digital divide. We will continue to serve as a key partner in the WSIS process and beyond, bringing together government and businesses to enhance trade and development in regions around the world.

**Denis Bélisle**

*Executive Director  
International Trade Centre (Geneva)*

## CIVIL SOCIETY

# Realistic expectations



After almost two years of intensive preparations and negotiation - at the international, regional and

national level - we have finally come to the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, the 3<sup>rd</sup> UN Summit of the new millennium. The major UN conferences of the nineties have taught us to work together. They have also led the international community to adopt, in September 2000, milestone commitments entrusted in the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals. How does the WSIS position itself with regard to these two major issues: the state of international cooperation and the contribution to minimum targets and goals that were agreed upon three years ago? What can we expect from the Summit that stands before us?

From a procedural and formal point of view, the preparatory process of the Summit has opened the door to a new era. In 2002, at the Earth Summit in Johannesburg, world leaders accepted the adoption of a "multi-stakeholder approach". By the establishment of the Civil Society Bureau, this "acquis" has been taken over by the WSIS process and even reinforced, which constitutes a major breakthrough towards the achievement of more democratic gov-

ernance at the global level. The structure of the Summit itself reflects this change as it will radically differ from previous UN Summits.

Further, civil society delegations have been allowed to participate on an ad-hoc basis in the negotiations, but governments are the final decision-making bodies and they are ultimately responsible for the success or the failure of the Summit.

After the deadlock at the end of Prepcom 3, we as civil society adopted a double strategy. We are still committed to the process and to the success of the event. But we are also ready to produce our own declaration, should the benchmarks and minimum standards we have set at the end of Prepcom 3 not be met.

These relate to the North-South divide and the compelling need to bridge the digital divide, notably by creating funding mechanisms that would contribute to achieving the targeted goal of 0,7% of GNP for development cooperation and thereby work towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

In the Millennium Declaration, world leaders acknowledged that "The central challenge we face today is to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for all the world's people". In order to come to this end, it says, there must be "policies and measures, at the global level, which correspond to the needs of developing

countries and economies in transition and are formulated and implemented with their effective participation".

The Summit before us offers a unique occasion to contribute to the realization of the Millennium Declaration through the tools that have made globalization happen and have become the symbol of globalisation: information and communication technologies. If no funding mechanisms are concretely set up to bridge the digital divide; if human rights don't become the cornerstone of the information society; if internet is not governed in a way that enhances the rights of the ones - to freedom of opinion, expression and information - without hampering the rights of the others - i.e. children becoming objects of paedophilia, minorities becoming victims of incitement to racial hatred, then this Summit will not help in the implementation of the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs.

In that case the international community will have moved one step back. It will then be up to civil society to fully assume its new role and responsibility and "emancipate" itself from the governmental deadlock. If governments are not able to agree, "we the people" have the vision and are committed to use the Summit as a spring board for sharing our vision and creating and shaping people-centred, inclusive information and communication societies where people are empowered to fully participate.

**Renate Bloem**

*President of the Conference of NGOs  
(CONGO)*

## Sponsors Thanks all

Switzerland, host country of the World Summit on the Information Society Geneva 2003, thanks all of the SPONSORS and is very grateful for the generous support of the following companies and organizations:

A very special thanks to the United Nations, the International Telecommunication Union, the Republic and Canton of Geneva and the City of Geneva.

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# The role of parliaments

Democracy is founded on the right of everyone to take part in the management of public affairs. It presupposes representation through parliament and the ability to make informed choices which in turn require freedom of expression and access to information. Equally, transparency and public accountability are essential to the functioning of democracy. Both entail the fundamental right of access to information about the activities of government.

The World Summit on the Information Society is about facilitating access to information; it is therefore also about strengthening democracy. The kind of society that the summit envisions is one in which people in all countries, North and South, enjoy access to and greater use of new information and communication technologies.

The issues at stake need to be worked through in parliament so that policies can benefit from public scrutiny and carry public support.

The policy choices must then be transposed into a legislative framework. There are a great many issues connected with the application of these technologies that require regulation. Some relate to issues of public health and morals, others to intellectual property rights, others to access to markets. All will need a legislative response, more often than not requiring an act of parliament.

This is always the case when it comes to collecting and allocating public funds through the national budget. It is one further reason why parliamentary participation and scrutiny in relation to new information and communication technologies is essential. Providing access and use at the scale that is envisaged by the visionaries who launched the world summit will require very substantial financial resources.

The linkages between democracy, parliaments and the information society are particularly striking in the area of e-democracy - the notion that innovative information and communication

technologies can be made to serve a new form of democracy that links individuals directly to decisions affecting their daily lives, and allows them to have a measurable impact on them. Similarly, new information and communication technologies have an extraordinary potential in enabling parliaments and their members to better exercise their oversight and legislative functions.

The opportunities for improving public services and increasing the citizen's influence in decision-making processes are breathtaking. At the same time, the challenges are daunting. Data protection and privacy issues must be properly addressed along with many other technical, legal and ethical questions.

At the end of the day, the emerging information society will have a profound impact on the functioning of democracy itself. This poses what may

be the most significant challenge for parliaments everywhere: to adapt to a new world in which electing representatives to parliament no longer constitutes the only, or even the principal manner in which people make their voices heard and hold government to account.

The World Summit on the Information Society deals with rights and issues that go to the very heart of democracy and the role of parliaments. The involvement of parliaments and their members in the debate that has started and in the summit follow-up is therefore crucial.

**Anders B. Johansson**

*Secretary-General, Inter-Parliamentary Union*

(The IPU is organising a panel discussion that is open to all delegates attending the Summit. The Parliamentary Panel "Shaping an enabling normative environment for the Information Society: the role and responsibility of parliaments" will take place in Room H at PALEXPO Centre from 3 to 6 p.m. on 11 December 2003)



WSIS

## Crossing the finish line

Just as the year 2003 draws to a close, the World Summit on the Information Society is crossing the finish line. Along the way, the preparatory process has accelerated and light has been shed on what was truly at stake during phase 1 of the WSIS. With the Geneva stage, the international community has now become aware of the fact that new information and communications technologies have triggered an entirely novel form of international communication. Though not yet complete, this awareness is based on the evidence that communication is about sharing.

In other words, to master communications and the digital revolution is to enrich one another. This mastery is not accomplished in one day or even in one stage. After having pioneered

efforts in Geneva, governments, civil society, and the private sector are now ready to follow the path leading to Tunis in 2005 for the second phase of the WSIS. This newsletter, which has accompanied us along the way over the course of the year now ending, is making its last appearance with this issue. I would like to express my most sincere appreciation to the high-level personalities for their contributions to global communications on the WSIS. At the dawn of a new stage, information that brings us closer together will be continued by other means, such as the website *www.wsis-online.net*, which will remain operational until the end of the Tunis phase.

**Daniel Stauffacher**

*Ambassador, Delegate of the Swiss Federal Council for the WSIS*